



Older persons and heat-susceptibility: The role of health promotion in a changing climate

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Abstract:

Issue addressed: Many studies world wide have provided evidence that older persons are a sub-population at increased risk of heat-related morbidity and mortality. This article gives an overview of the current state of knowledge of risk factors and provides commentary on the role of health promotion in the prevention of a climate change-related increase in elderly heat casualties. Methods: A search of peer-reviewed medical and epidemiological literature and community health websites was conducted in order to gain an in-depth understanding of heat-susceptibility in the elderly and preventive strategies. Key search words included: elderly, aged, older, heat, thermoregulation, heat wave, mortality, heat effects, dehydration, heat-related illness, adaptation, adaptive capacity. Results: The reasons underlying reduced heat tolerance in this group are multi-faceted, comprising physiological, social and behavioural limitations, with comorbidities and polypharmacy being contributing factors. Additionally, some older persons may be unable or reluctant to undertake adaptations necessary to maintain thermal homeostasis due to diminished awareness of the heat, lowered thirst sensation, mobility or cognitive impairments, a lowered perception of risk, or economic concerns. Conclusion: With older persons in poor health being particularly vulnerable to heat, preventive messages need to promote protective behaviours and help build resilience as temperatures rise.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Health Professional, Public

Early Warning System:

resource focus on systems used to warn populations of high temperatures, extreme weather, or other elements of climate change to prevent harm to health

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Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Temperature

Temperature: Extreme Heat

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Urban

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Injury, Other Health Impact

Other Health Impact: heat related mortality

Medical Community Engagement:

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern:

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Review

Resilience:

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capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment:

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content